

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
Veterans Health Administration  
Office of Academic Affiliations  
Washington, DC

**PROGRAM ANNOUNCEMENT**

**Pre-Doctoral Associated Health Rehabilitation Research Fellowship  
Program for Academic Year 2005-2006**

**1. PURPOSE**

This program announcement provides background information, policies, and procedures to Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities and eligible students for submitting applications to the Office of Academic Affiliations (OAA) for approval as a Pre-Doctoral Associated Health Rehabilitation Research Fellowship Program site and approval of a fellow at the approved VA site.

The purpose of this fellowship program is to build upon current rehabilitation research capacity within VA by providing an opportunity for interested students to develop expertise in clinical research methods and designs. It is expected that fellows in this program will assume leadership roles in rehabilitation research and clinical care after receiving their doctoral degrees.

These fellowships are designed for graduate students who have completed their doctoral course work in a rehabilitation health care profession and are prepared to work on a research dissertation of relevance to the health care needs of veterans with disabilities<sup>1</sup>. Students pursuing doctorates in rehabilitation health care professions such as rehabilitation engineering, occupational therapy, physical therapy, audiology, speech-language pathology, nursing, psychology, and orientation/mobility are encouraged to apply.

**2. GENERAL BACKGROUND**

VA Rehabilitation Research supports investigations pursuing improved functional independence and quality of life for veterans with disabling conditions experienced as a consequence of trauma or disease. Areas of high research priority include prosthetics; orthotics; mobility; orthopedics; amputations; spinal cord injury and other neurologic disorders; single or multiple impairments of vision, hearing, and communications; traumatic brain injury; dementia and cognitive disorders; geriatric rehabilitation; chronic psychiatric disorders; and

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<sup>1</sup> To demonstrate the relevancy of the research to VA care of veterans, it should involve the veteran population in the sample. However, there are situations when non-veteran populations would be appropriate:

(1) The study compares an intervention with a veteran population and a non-veteran population. Studies that compare VA to non-VA care are acceptable.

(2) The local sample is not large enough to provide adequate statistical power. Thus, for example, a sample from a VA nursing home may need to be supplemented with a community-based nursing home to provide adequate statistical power. An additional justification for a non-veteran sample might be to have an adequate number of women or minority patients in the sample

(3) The study intervention or measurement tool is not presently available at a VA site, yet is relevant to a veteran population. Generally, the goal in these studies is to show that the intervention or measurement tool is efficacious in a non-VA site before incurring the high cost of developing and implementing a pilot at a VA site.

rehabilitation outcomes. In all of these areas, studies seek to establish the efficacy or effectiveness of interventions across the health care continuum.

VA has a significant need for doctorally prepared researchers in rehabilitation and a legislated mission of assisting in the education of health professionals for VA and the Nation. Many VA employees are prior VA trainees and this program may serve as an excellent recruitment pool.

### **3. POLICY**

a. Fellows must agree to a full-time (40 hours per week) appointment at a VA facility during the fellowship period. Funding for this fellowship generally starts October 1, 2005. However, upon request, OAA will approve funds to start in August or September to coincide with the academic year.

b. Proposed research must be able to be completed within the one-year time frame of the fellowship program and must be relevant to VA care of veterans with disabilities. VA relevance generally means including VA patients or using VA databases in the research sample. (See footnote on page one.)

c. The annual stipend for the Pre-Doctoral Associated Health Rehabilitation Research Fellowship Program is \$18,750 (\$9.01 per hour). OAA will provide approved VA facilities with funding for stipends and for VA's share (7.65%) of Federal Insurance Contribution Act (FICA) and VA's share of health and life insurance premiums, as well as FTEE. Fellows are required to pay the employee's portion of the premiums for these programs.

d. Other expenses connected with the fellow's recruitment, educational activities or travel must be funded from other sources.

e. Fellows who are recruited for this program must identify their VA appointments/fellowship in all reports, publications and presentations that are related to the fellowship and the supported research. Failure to do so may result in termination of the fellowship award or program by OAA. Fellows should provide OAA with an abstract for all publications and presentations based on the supported research. These may be posted on the OAA website.

f. There is no employment obligation required following completion of the fellowship program although fellows are strongly encouraged to seek VA employment and VA facilities are encouraged to employ them whenever possible.

### **4. VA FACILITY ELIGIBILITY**

a. The VA facility must have resources, environment, and clinical programs to support proposed research of the applicant. The facility should be committed to supporting the career path of the fellow after completion of the fellowship, whenever possible.

b. The fellowship program director must be a VA employee. This person will be responsible for administrative oversight of the program. Doctoral preparation is desired but not required. The program director may, but does not have to, be the primary preceptor.

c. The preceptor must be doctorally prepared and have research and clinical expertise relevant to the applicant's research proposal. The preceptor may be a VA employee at the facility or on the faculty at the university, holding a paid or without compensation (WOC)

appointment at the VA facility. VA employees who are preceptors should also hold an academic appointment in the affiliated university.

d. The VA facility must have an approved affiliation agreement with the academic program of the applicant by the date the fellowship program begins. The academic program must be accredited by the nationally recognized accrediting body for the health care discipline.

## **5. APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY**

a. Applicant must be a citizen of the United States. No exceptions will be approved.

b. If the applicant is a clinical health professional and is eligible for licensure, he/she must have a valid, unrestricted license to practice in at least one of the states or territories of the U.S., as appropriate for the discipline. Some applicants may not be eligible for licensure at this time in their careers. For example, the number of supervised practice hours required for licensure may not yet have been completed.

c. Applicant must be enrolled in a doctoral program in a rehabilitation health care discipline. Applicant must be classified as a doctoral candidate, have completed the doctoral program's required coursework, and passed the comprehensive examination prior to the beginning of funding. If the applicant does not meet these requirements at the time of application,

- a letter from the academic program should be included with the application to explain what the applicant must do to obtain candidate status, when the coursework will be completed, and when the comprehensive examination will be given. The letter should also state the expectation that these requirements will be met by the intended start date of the fellowship program.
- and if the applicant is selected for the fellowship program, the applicant will not be allowed to start the program until documentation is received by the Office of Academic Affiliations that the requirements have been met.

d. Proposed research must be

- relevant to VA care of veterans. (See footnote on page one.)
- approved by the applicant's graduate school dissertation committee as well as the VA facility's Research and Development (R&D) Committee.
  - If it is not possible to obtain approval by the dissertation committee and/or the VA R&D Committee prior to submission of the application, letters should be included from appropriate officials indicating that approval is anticipated prior to October 1, 2005. Documentation of approval should be sent to OAA as soon as possible.
  - If selected, the applicant may not begin the fellowship until OAA receives documentation from the academic program and/or the VA facility that these have been accomplished.
- able to be completed within the one-year time frame of the fellowship.

## **6. APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS**

a. The VA facility should submit an original and five copies of the application, including transmittal memorandum, to be received in OAA no later than **May 27, 2005**. Applications that arrive in OAA after May 27 will be returned to the facility without action.

b. The application **must not exceed 37 pages** including the transmittal memorandum, core narrative, and appendices, other than the curricula vita, and must contain the information listed below. The font must be at least 10 point and the margins must be at least one inch.

(1) Transmittal letter from the facility Director stating:

- (a) that the facility is prepared to support the fellowship program.
- (b) that the research proposal has been approved by the local Research and Development Committee and appropriate subcommittees. If this review is pending, state current status and anticipated date of approval notification. Documentation of approval should be sent to OAA as soon as possible.
- (c) the name, routing symbol, e-mail address, telephone number and fax number of the fellowship program director at the VA facility and the preceptor.

(2) Core narrative, which should **not exceed 20 pages**, is to outline the proposed research, provide background on both student and preceptor, state how the research is relevant to VA care of veterans with disabilities, how the research results might be useful to VA, and how VA facility resources will support the fellow.

The following information must be contained within this section:

- (a) Applicant's name, description of background, including undergraduate education; college/university, graduate education, name of dissertation advisor/chair.
- (b) Applicant's short and long-term career goals for after completion of dissertation.
- (c) Description of the proposed research including:
  - Title of the proposed research
  - Introduction/statement of the problem
  - Research questions or hypotheses
  - Background/brief literature review
  - Design and methods including instrumentation and procedures
  - Data analysis plan
- (d) Statement of how the proposed research is relevant to VA care of veterans with disabilities.
- (e) Statement of how research results might be useful to researchers, managers, and clinicians.
- (f) Calendar plan of expected activities related to the research plan and the applicant's development with approximate apportionment of time.
- (g) Name and title of proposed preceptor, brief description of the preceptor's background as related to proposed research and record of mentoring rehabilitation professionals. Curricula vitae should be included in appendix and do not count toward page limit.
- (h) List of names, position titles, and roles or contributions of individuals in the VA facility that will collaborate with the preceptor in providing clinical and research opportunities for the fellow.
- (i) Description of VA facility resources and environment that demonstrate research and clinical care programs supportive of the applicant's research activities. Commitment of the VA facility to support the fellow after dissertation completion is strongly encouraged.

- (3) Appendices, which **must not exceed 15 pages**, excluding curricula vita.
- (a) Biographical sketch, résumé, or curriculum vitae of program director, preceptor and applicant (not included in page limit).
  - (b) Letter from chairperson of the graduate department where the applicant is enrolled stating that:
    - the applicant is a doctoral candidate or is expected to be by October 1 or the beginning of the fellowship and what is yet to be achieved for this status;
    - the applicant is ready or expected to be ready by October 1 to pursue research for the completion of the dissertation; and,
    - the applicant's research design has been approved by a dissertation committee or is anticipated to be approved by October 1, 2004.
  - (c) Letter from the VA facility Research Office stating that the dissertation research proposal has been approved by the local Research and Development Committee and any appropriate subcommittees. If this approval is pending, current status and anticipated date of approval notification should be stated. Documentation of approval should be submitted as soon as possible.
  - (d) Letters of support and other relevant information. Specifically include letters of support from the proposed fellowship program director, the preceptor, other individuals who will be involved in the fellowship program, and the VA facility clinical leader of the applicant's profession.

## **7. REVIEW PROCESS**

a. Proposals will be reviewed by an ad-hoc committee of scientists, researchers, educators, and clinicians selected by OAA.

b. The following criteria will be used for evaluating the applications:

- (1) VA Facility
  - (a) Resources and environment of the host VA facility showing research and clinical care programs supportive of the applicant's research activities.
  - (b) Evidence of a commitment from the VA facility and affiliated institution to support the career path of the pre-doctoral fellow. (Commitment of VA facility to support fellow after dissertation completion is strongly encouraged.)
  - (c) Preceptor's track record in area of research as related through publications, awards, and previously funded research.
  - (d) Preceptor's previous experience in mentoring.
- (2) Applicant
  - (a) Record to date
  - (b) Proposed career goals
  - (c) Demonstrated evidence of dedication to the care of veterans
- (3) Research Proposal
  - (a) Proposed research questions and design
  - (b) Relevance and applicability to the care of veterans with disabilities
  - (c) Able to be completed in 1-year time frame of the fellowship program

## **8. PROGRAM EVALUATION**

a. The Rehabilitation Research Pre-doctoral Fellowship Program must be evaluated at the end of the fiscal year by each fellow, the host VA facility staff, and the preceptors. Evaluation criteria for this program will include the following:

- (1) Completion of fellow's program and attainment of the fellow's goals and objectives
- (2) Fellow's satisfaction with the program
- (3) Preceptor's satisfaction with his/her role, fellow's progress, and the program in general
- (4) Facility (e.g., Chief of Staff, Associate Chief of Staff for Education and/or Research, Clinical Service Chief) satisfaction with the program and impact of the program on the VA facility
- (5) Recommendations for program improvement at both local and national levels
- (6) The outcome of the fellow's dissertation research and potential utilization in the care of veterans
- (7) Recruitment of the fellow to VA employment or continuing involvement with VA activities

b. Evaluation reports will be submitted to the Office of Academic Affiliations (143) within one month after completion of the program.

c. Fellows should send OAA a copy of all publications and an abstract of all posters and presentations based on the VA supported research. These may be posted on the OAA web site or cited in VA public affairs documents.

## **9. APPOINTMENT AND PAY**

a. The per annum training rate for the Pre-Doctoral Associated Health Rehabilitation Research Fellowship Program is \$18,750. OAA will provide approved VA facilities with funding for stipends and for VA's share (7.65%) of Federal Insurance Contribution Act (FICA) and VA's share of health and life insurance premiums, as well as FTEE. Fellows must pay the employee's portion of the premiums. Other expenses connected with the fellow's recruitment, educational activities or travel must be funded from other sources.

b. Appointments will be made under 38 U.S.C. 7405(a)(1) for a period not to exceed three years with termination at the end of the one-year training period. Actual salaries for these pre-doctoral fellows will be the proportionate amount of the above cited per annum training rate determined in the manner prescribed by VA Handbook 5007, Part II, Chapter 2, paragraph 2.m. For PAID coding purposes, these fellows will be identified by the use of Pay Plan, N; Series Code, 0601; Title Code, 54; Assignment Code, T5; Title, Rehabilitation Research Trainee; Subaccount, 1051; FTE, 0.5; Grade/Step, 00/N.

c. Pre-doctoral fellows may be detailed to other educational institutions without loss of pay, but not for more than one-sixth of the time of their fellowship. (*Reference: VA Handbook 5007, Part II, Chapter 2, Paragraph 2.m.*)

d. General Schedule annual and sick leave policy applies to fellows under this program. Fellows are eligible for life and health insurance benefits. Fellows should be strongly encouraged to use their annual leave before the end of the fellowship program so a lump-sum payment for accrued annual leave will not be required. The Office of Academic Affiliations pays for stipend support, but generally not for the lump-sum payment. Therefore, local facilities will not generally be reimbursed for the lump-sum payment.

e. Fellows are eligible for life and health insurance benefits but are required to pay the employee's portion of the premium.

f. Fellows will be protected from personal liability while providing professional services at a VA health care facility under the Federal Employees Liability Reform and Tort Compensation Act, 28 U.S.C. 2679 (b)-(d).

## 10. MAILING INSTRUCTIONS AND CONTACT

a. Due to continuing delays and irradiation of mail to VA Central Office, applications should be sent via Federal Express.

b. Mail original and five copies of application, including transmittal memorandum to:  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
Office of Academic Affiliations (143)  
ATTN: Linda McInturff  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Room 475E  
Washington, DC 20420

c. **NO FAXES WILL BE ACCEPTED.**

d. Questions regarding this program announcement should be referred to Linda D. Johnson, Ph.D., R.N., Director, Associated Health Education Office, Office of Academic Affiliations, at [Linda.Johnson@hq.med.va.gov](mailto:Linda.Johnson@hq.med.va.gov) or at 202.273.8372.

## 11. SCHEDULE

Application due in OAA	May 27, 2005
VA facilities notified of approval/non-approval	July 22, 2005
Fellowship begins (unless all approval criteria are not met or unless an August or September funding is approved by OAA)	October 1, 2005
Evaluation report due to OAA	October 30, 2006 or within 30 day of completion of fellowship